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Russia: Anti-Semitism and response by the government (2005 - March 2007)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2006*, published by the United States Department of State, "[e]xplicit, racially motivated violent attacks against Jews were fairly rare in the context of rapidly growing racist violence in the country, especially perpetrated by skinheads targeting identifiable ethnic groups" (US 15 Sept. 2006, Sec. 2). The report stated that there were three explicit anti-Semitic violent attacks in 2005, down from 2004 (*ibid.*). The Tel Aviv-based Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism states in its report on Russia for the year 2005 that "Jews are not the prime target of 'street racists'," who target mainly blacks and natives of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific region (2005). However, reports of racially motivated attacks against Jews continue to be recorded (Stephen Roth Institute 2005; *Haaretz* 29 Jan. 2007). According to a study released by the Jewish Agency for Israel, a non-profit organization involved in assisting Jewish immigration to Israel (Jewish Agency n.d.), and quoted by the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, there were 300 recorded anti-Semitic incidents in Russia in 2006, compared to 250 in 2005 (*ibid.*).

In 2005, two rabbis were attacked near a Moscow synagogue (AP 25 July 2005; Stephen Roth Institute 2005) by men shouting anti-Semitic insults (*ibid.*). Six months after their arrest, the perpetrators were convicted of assault and hooliganism rather than committing a hate crime; one of them was sentenced to four years in jail (*ibid.*; AP 25 July 2005) and the other to one and a half years (Stephen Roth Institute 2005).

On 11 January 2006, a man yelling anti-Semitic slogans burst into a Moscow synagogue and stabbed eight worshippers (*The Boston Globe* 12 Jan. 2006). At least three of them were seriously injured (*Los Angeles Times* 12 Jan. 2006) but their condition stabilized by the next day (*The Jerusalem Post* 13 Jan. 2006). While the government proceeded to tighten security for synagogues across the country, Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar criticized what he felt was "inadequate" police action against extremist groups (*The Boston Globe* 12 Jan. 2006) and urged police to guard synagogues (AP 16 Jan. 2006). In the wake of the attack, Boris Gryzov, speaker of the Duma (the Russian parliament's lower house), stated that lawmakers would consider stricter laws to prevent similar attacks in the future (*The Jerusalem Post* 13 Jan. 2006). An Associated Press (AP) journalist cites unnamed human rights activists as stating that "[extremist] groups are emboldened by mild prosecution of hate crimes" (AP 16 Jan. 2006), but this information could not be corroborated by the Research Directorate within time constraints. According to an uncorroborated statement made by Alla Gerber, head of the Holocaust Foundation, "anti-Semitism persisted within some law enforcement ranks despite high-level condemnation" (*ibid.*).

Days after the 11 January 2006 attack, the Russian Jewish Communities Federation announced that it was forming a joint working group with the Moscow police to combat anti-Semitism and to "improve restraints on extremist organizations and the nationalist ideas they profess and to curb their activities" (Interfax 18 Jan. 2006). In addition, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) reported that the Jewish community was coming up with several security initiatives of its own, such as the launch of Magen David, a Jewish security fund (20 Jan. 2006). The fund aims to raise money through worldwide donations in order to provide round-the-clock security to the country's synagogues and other Jewish organizations (JTA 20 Jan. 2006). According to the JTA, Russian Jewish organizations usually use unarmed security personnel provided by private companies, but activists believe more measures, such as metal doors, metal detectors, panic buttons and video cameras are now needed (*ibid.*). The JTA also notes the launching of a program for teaching self-defence techniques combining martial arts and psychological training to Russia's Jewish communities (*ibid.*).

On 9 February 2007, a court in Yekaterinburg sentenced five teenagers for the racially motivated killing of a 21-year old Jewish man in a cemetery in October 2005 (RFE/RL 9 Feb. 2007; *Haaretz* 9 Feb. 2007); the five were given prison terms ranging from five to ten years (*ibid.*).

According to the Stephen Roth Institute, 2005 saw a "surge in antisemitic propaganda, linked mainly to the January 2005 'Letter of 500' - an appeal to the prosecutor general urging him to review the activity of all Jewish organizations in Russia due to their alleged extremism" against non-Jews (2005). The letter also accused Jews of ritual murder and compared Judaism to Satanism (BBC 17 Feb. 2005). The letter was published in *Rus Pravoslavnaya* (Stephen Roth Institute 2005), an "extremist" Russian Orthodox newspaper (FSU Monitor 1 Feb. 2005), and included 500 signatures (Stephen Roth Institute 2005), including 19 from members of the State Duma (ibid.; BBC 17 Feb. 2005), of which 14 were from the Rodina Party and 5 were from the Communist Party (Stephen Roth Institute 2005). By March 2005, a modified version of the letter had garnered 5,000 signatures and a further 10,000 by the end of the year (ibid.). While the government warned *Rus Pravoslavnaya* that its actions were illegal (ibid.; FSU Monitor 1 Feb. 2005), the newspaper reportedly continues to publish anti-Semitic material (Stephen Roth Institute 2005). In an interview with Interfax-Religion, Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar stated that while anti-Semitism was a "marginal phenomenon in Russia," he was dismayed at what he considered the mute reaction of the State Prosecutor's Office to the "Letter of 500" (FJC 15 July 2005).

The report by the Stephen Roth Institute notes that "[a]ntisemitic books are freely obtainable in stores and book kiosks in Russia" (2005). In March 2005, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS reported that the Eksmo publishing house had published 200,000 school notebooks depicting skinheads and including a skinhead glossary, an action that was condemned by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) (21 Mar. 2005). The Moscow-based Narodnoye Radio (Popular Radio) station reportedly includes anti-Semitic material in its broadcasts, which are mostly religious in nature (Stephen Roth Institute 2005). "Nasha Strategia" (Our Strategy), an "explicitly antisemitic TV show" based in Saint Petersburg, ran out of funding in 2005 but was replaced by an "equally antisemitic TV show" in which hosts and guests expressed their anti-Jewish prejudices (ibid.).

Citing a report published on the Russian-language Jewish.ru Web site, the *Bigotry Monitor*, a Washington, DC-based newspaper published by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, states that the Kaliningrad Prosecutor's Office informed Jewish community leaders that it would charge the community 60,000 roubles [approximately CAD2,400 (Canada 6 Feb. 2006)] to investigate the publication and distribution of anti-Semitic articles and books (17 Feb. 2006). According to Jewish.ru, it would be "highly irregular" for the Prosecutor's Office to demand payment for doing its job (*Bigotry Monitor* 17 Feb. 2006).

According to the Stephen Roth Institute, "[a]ntisemitic pronouncements are so numerous that they are virtually routine, and therefore do not attract the attention of law enforcement authorities"; complaints about anti-Semitism rarely reach the courts (Stephen Roth Institute 2005). Nevertheless, the Stephen Roth Institute acknowledged "a considerable increase in convictions for dissemination of hate propaganda" in 2005, when 13 people were found guilty of this offence and six received a fine or a short prison sentence (ibid.). On 9 December 2005, a Federal Court sentenced Dmitrii Bobrov, leader of the neo-Nazi Schultz-88 group, to six years of imprisonment for organizing an extremist and anti-semitic organization" (ibid.). Three other Schultz-88 members received three-year suspended sentences (ibid.).

An August 2006 poll by the Levada Center, an independent sociological Russian research firm (*The New York Times* 17 Nov. 2006), notes that 41 percent of Russians wanted to reduce the influence of Jews in public life, although this percentage was down from 48 percent in 2004 (*Kommersant* 28 Aug. 2006). An earlier poll conducted in January 2006 (Interfax 14 Feb. 2006) by the government-controlled (*The New York Times* 17 Nov. 2006) All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Studies (VTsIOM) reportedly found that 6 percent of Russians polled admitted to being anti-Semitic, while 22 percent were indifferent and 64 percent rejected this ideology (Interfax 14 Feb. 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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